

# Good threshing provided loads of excitement

By Dennis Smith

In late summer, the giant threshers would come out of hiding and perch themselves round about the towns — in the middle of fields, where wagons of wheat would have easy access to them, and in barnyards, where excitement would always accompany their arrival.

Pulled by huge steam engines, the threshers would make their way over narrow bridges across irrigation ditches, sometimes dropping a wheel, which would mean extra time and manpower to extricate them. Sometimes, the gates would be too narrow for them, and fenceposts would have to be removed to let them pass.

And sometimes, a mishandled turn on a narrow farm road would cause a thresher to tip over. In such cases, whole frameworks of beams with blocks and tackles would have to be constructed to get them righted again.

Once set up, the steam engine would be backed off about a hundred feet and a long belt would be attached between the two machines — an umbilical to feed the lifeblood of power from the engine to the thresher.

As the morning shadows lifted, you might hear the first belching echoes of the engine as the long belt between thresher and engine began to turn. The single seam in the belt would pass over the distance between the two, faster and faster as the engine speed built. The shakers and winnowing trays in the thresher would begin to vibrate, the

sound building to such a high pitch that all conversation had to be carried on in yells and shouting.

The pigs and sheep in their pens and the young calves would all become restless at the unfamiliar racket, and, for a time, would pace nervously back and forth.

High on the wheat wagons, men with sharp-tined pitchforks would begin tossing sheaves of wheat into the mouth of the monster, where sharp metal shark's teeth tore at the bundles and ripped them to shreds as they disappeared down the throat.

Along the sides, the galvanized tin skin vibrated with the movement from inside. Cogs and wheels whirled. Belts whipped and fine yellow dust began to settle on every flat or slightly slanted surface.

The sandy gurgling of winnowed wheat could be heard rising up the augers and dropping into the horizontal auger that car-

ried it out and away, where it dropped like a stream of tan life into burlap bags. From time to time, the man on the bags would stick his hand into the stream and it would separate around his fingers like water.

Toward the back, the centrifuge that threw the straw toward the stack would whine like a gigantic top; you could hear the straw as it hit the blades and was spit into and up the long and ominous tube, as huge, it seemed, as a telephone pole or the trunk of a tree.

There, high above all else, out of the end of that awful beast, the straw would spew in a constant stream. Caught by the air, it would whirl downward and out, creating a slowly growing hill of golden straw, which after a couple of hours would cover the edge of the fence and build a highway to the roof of the shed.

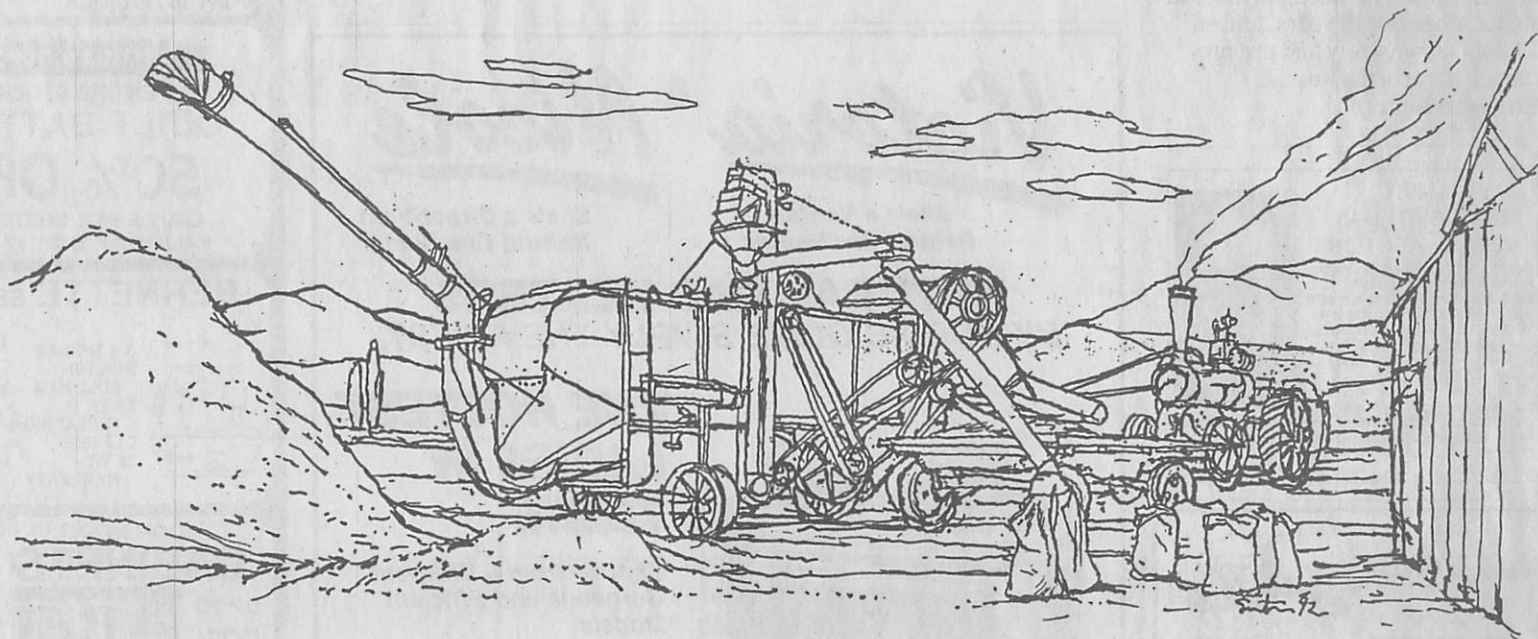
The men were constantly on guard for

sparks from the engine as they boiled skyward from the smokestack of the steam engine. It would take only one to catch the rising pyramid of straw ablaze and turn the entire barnyard into an inferno.

By evening, the task would sometimes be accomplished and the thresher on its way again. But some years it would stay overnight. In the evening, after everyone had gone, its dark silhouette out against the barn would look like a huge animal, reaching its gaping arm and mouth against the stars.

As they lay in bed, young farm kids would be as anxious as if it were Christmas as they imagined the coming of morning, when the men in coveralls would come again to fire up the engine and start the long belt winding again for second day of threshing.

Dennis Smith is an artist and writer living in Highland, Utah County.



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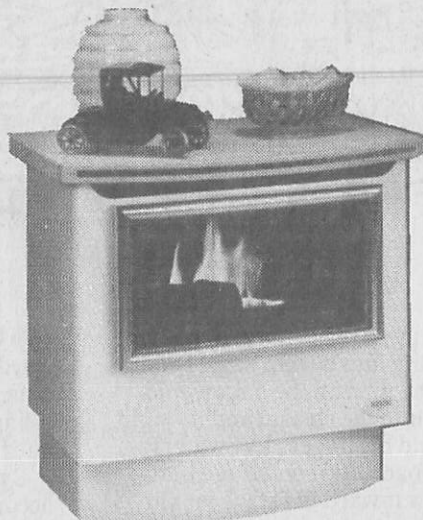


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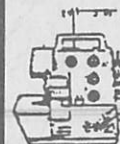
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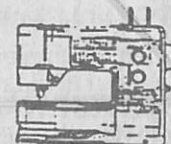
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